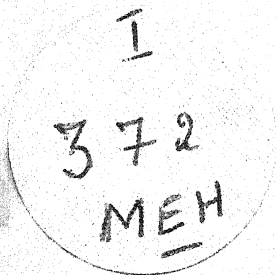
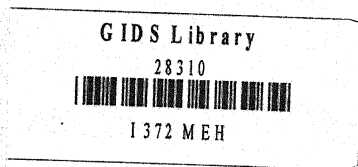


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PRIMARY EDUCATION IN UTTARAKHAND :
INEQUALITY AMONG GENERAL CASTES
AND SCHEDULED CASTES/TRIBES

G. S. Mehta

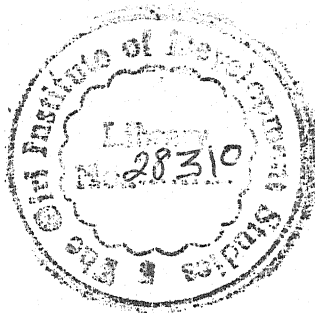


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G.S. MEHTA*

INTRODUCTION

It has been well recognised that imparting education implies improvements in cognitive ability, technical skill and knowledge, productive efficiency and mobility in different occupations and geographical areas, thus enhancing productivity and as a consequence raising earnings and income levels of individuals and also increasing contribution to economic development. Besides the general contribution that education makes to economic development, it is also considered a potent instrument for bringing about equality of economic opportunity among different segment of population. So, it is plausible that education can compensate for lack of material assets, so as to improve socio-economic conditions of people, who own little or no asset, and are socio-economically backward for the past several generations, and thus influence a degree of socio-economic equality, despite inequality in the ownership of material resources.

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Recognizing the value of education in terms of its role in social and economic change, national integration and as a important source for a transformation of system to relate it more closely to the life of people and reducing the problems of socio-economic inequalities among people, the education has always been accorded an important and honoured place in Indian society. Therefore, increasing emphasis has been provide to impart education among the socially and economically disadvantaged groups of population.

In India, the scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes have been recognised among the most disadvantaged groups of population in the availment of educational facility and finding an opportunity for their socio-economic development. In order to bring improvement in socio-economic conditions of SC/ST population and to reduce the existing inequality in at certain extent, this regard, due emphasis has been provided to increase their participation in different levels of education.

PLANNING FOR PROVIDING PRIMARY EDUCATION FACILITIES:

Providing educational opportunity to socio-economically weaker groups of population especially among Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes have been considered as an important obligation under the constitutional provisions of India. The constitution in its article 29, emphasised that the state shall promote with special care the educational and economic

interest of the weaker sections and in particular to SC/ST population and shall protect them from the social injustice and all forms of exploitations. Also, under the various planning strategies, education has been valued as an important element in achieving rapid development, technological progress and in catering to a social order, social and economic justice and equal opportunity among different socio-economic groups of population.

In order to maximise the enrolments of SC/ST children at different levels of education, the Government has introduced various kinds of measures after the independence over different plans. The Union Ministry of Education sent a circular to different States/Union Territories in 1954, asking them for reservation of twenty per cent seats in admissions of SC/ST population in educational institution, which was followed by all states, and the policy of reservation is still well maintained. Besides, emphasis had been laid on the expansion of primary educational facilities in different areas, giving priority to the areas/locations dominated by SC/ST population, and also on providing common incentives and subsidies in general and free tuition, books and stationery aids, scholarships, free hostel accommodation for SC/ST children.

Later, Education Commission (1964-66) had recommended continuation and expansion of educational development programmes and the provision of best possible and larger numbers of incentives, subsidised educational facility, and

the provision of scholarship to different disadvantaged groups of children so as to increase their participation in the availment of different level of education.

Besides, the SC/ST students are given general and residential scholarship, special coaching facilities at different educational levels from different Government Departments. Under the provision of opportunity cost system, the SC/ST girls and boys are provided scholarships and other financial incentives starting from class one in the states. Increasing attention is also being given in the expansion of primary educational schools in the recently identified Ambedkar villages and villages dominated by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Relaxation in criteria of opening schools for these areas is also strictly followed. All the school going children at primary school have been covered under the provision of scholarships so as to attract increasing numbers of SC/ST children to enrol themselves in the schools. For the purpose of efficiently and proper distribution of scholarships and other incentives among SC/ST children the Village Education Committees, (VEC), headed by village Pradhan and head master of concerned school and a representative among the parents of SC/ST children as the member, has been formed. The scholarship is to be distributed among SC/ST children every year in two instalments in the presence of VEC.

The state is, thus, in the wake of the expansion of primary educational facilities and providing various kinds of incentives and infrastructural facilities so that each group of population, particularly socio-economically disadvantaged groups living in inaccessible and remote areas of the state may avail the educational facilities equitably and improve upon their socio-economic status and life style. The social objective of providing subsidised elementary education and increasing emphasis in its expansion in SC/ST dominated areas could enable this socio-economically most disadvantaged groups of population to achieve the objective of higher education, resulting in considerable improvements in their socio-economic conditions through widening opportunity for better remunerative employment opportunities.

THE PRESENT STUDY:

However, expansion of educational facilities, introduction of various incentives and providing financial assistance to maximise the enrolments of disadvantaged groups of population are necessary but not a sufficient condition for improving enrolment; retention and completion rate. What really is more important is the extent to which these various facilities of education are being utilised by the people. Success in providing educational facilities can be said to have been achieved when various socio-economic groups of population utilise is fully and equitably. The present paper is, therefore, an attempt to examine the extent of

inequalities existing in the pattern of utilisation of primary education facility, in terms of enrolments, drop-out, and retention among the scheduled castes/scheduled tribe and other general caste groups of children in a educationally well developed district.

THE SCOPE AND THE SAMPLE OF STUDY:

The studies undertaken during the past on the issues related to the causes and problems of inequalities existing in the availment of education among different socio-economic groups of population has well recognised that the school related problems, mainly inaccessibility to educational facility and poor socio-economic backward of households have been among the most important elements preventing larger segment of children from utilising desired level of educational facility. Thus, inequalities in availment of educational facility have been more largely existing between socio-economically developed and backward areas, and among different socio-economic groups of population in different countries and within the country at regional level.

Keeping into consideration the various issues related to causes and elements promoting the extent of disparities in utilisation pattern of primary educational facilities among different socio-economic groups of population the present study was undertaken in socio-economically most backward region of Uttarakhand. A significant importance in selecting

Uttarakhand for the purpose of present study has also been that despite persisting poor socio-economic conditions of people and typical and difficult geographical and topographical situations of the region imposing restrictions in expansion of primary educational facilities, the literacy rates of population as well as enrolment rates of children both, boys and girls has been recorded significantly higher than the state average for the last several years.

A sample of 40 primary schools from different geographical areas of six development blocks, comprising three blocks each among socio-economically and educationally well developed and poorly developed blocks have finally been selected from district Almora in Uttarakhand District Almora is among the educationally most developed district of U.P. as well as of Uttarakhand. According to 1991 census, the literacy rate in the district was 58.66 per cent; 79.96 per cent for male and 39.60 per cent for females; were significantly higher than the corresponding figures at the state level; 41.60 per cent; 55.73 per cent and 25.31 per cent respectively.

The three sample blocks having relatively lower levels of enrolments are socio-economically most backward blocks and are situated in the high mountain areas. However, three other sample blocks are located in low mountain and valley areas of the districts and are socio-economically well

developed as compared to former groups of blocks. A sample of 26 primary schools from former and 14 primary schools from latter groups of blocks has been selected for the collection of required necessary information. The study is based on both secondary data collected from the office of Basic Shiksha Adhikari, Almora and primary data collected from the sample primary schools. The analysis of data, in terms of enrolments, drop-out and retention is separately carried out for educationally developed and backward blocks so as to examine at what extent the level of inequalities are existing among different socio-economic groups of population among these blocks.

PROVISION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION FACILITY

In Almora district provision of primary educational facility has been quite adequate both in terms of numbers and geographical spread. Special care has also been taken to provide educational facilities in different remote and educationally backward areas and areas dominated by socially disadvantaged groups of population, such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Considering the geographical and topographical problems existing in the district, relaxation in the norms and criteria fixed for the establishment of primary level school facilities based on minimum coverage of population size and the distance of villages to nearest school is also made. During recent past, initiatives have also been taken to appoint atleast one woman teacher in every

school. This has been done on the understanding that women teachers can better understand the psychology and problems of the children, related to them, motivate them to learn and benefit from the educational activities in the school, and they can also be instrumental in getting more girls into schools and retaining them in the schools.

The responsibility of providing primary education in the district especially in the rural areas rests mainly with the government through the Basic. Shiksha Parishad. Yet, various non-government organisations, trusts and indigenous organisations are also engaged in providing pre-primary level and basic education in different areas of the district. However, we have covered only government primary schools for the purpose of present study.

ACCESS TO PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

In spite of the fact that considerable emphasis has been placed on universalisation of primary education as part of the process of planned development since fifties and great importance attached to providing access to primary schools to all sections of the society, yet it has not been possible till today to provide all remote areas and smaller sized hamlets with basic educational facilities. In certain areas of the district, particularly high mountain and at high altitude areas, the children have to cover upto 4 to 6 kms. distance to reach the nearest primary school. The nature of

human settlements in these areas with a large number of small and widely scattered hamlets has created a genuine problem of making primary schools easily accessible to the children of these villages.

In spite of the large number of primary schools having been already established in Almora district a number of habitations still remain unreserved. As per the norms prevalent in the hills a primary school should be established within a distance of 1 Km from a village and in habitations where population exceeds 300. However, at present the average size of population per school works out to 560 in the district. Also in 10 of the 14 blocks of the district the average population per school is more than 500 while in three blocks it is more than 460. As per the estimates of Basic Education Department 79 new primary schools are to be established in the district in order to achieve saturation on the basis of existing norms of opening schools in the hills.

UTILISATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION:

The total population of children in the primary school going age (6-11 years), is reported to be 1.32 lakhs in district Almora and comprises of 67 thousand boys and 65 thousand girls. The actual number of children enrolled in the primary schools is around 1.23 lakhs. This enrolment of girls was found to be around 48 per cent of the total. The proportion of children among the primary school going age

group enrolled in schools thus comes to 93.17 per cent. The enrolment rates of boys and girls are estimated to be 94.63 per cent and 91.69 per cent respectively in the district. The enrolment rates of girls and boys are more or less similar in most of the blocks of the district, except in some blocks situated at higher altitudes and high mountain areas; there is no major problem of enrolment of girls.

During our visits in different sample areas it was found that both school related problems as well as poor socio-economic background of children are the main factors associated with the poor enrolment of children in primary schools. In high mountain areas the villages are very small in size and the settlements are widely dispersed. Therefore a significant proportion of children of these villages has to cover long distances upto 7 kms to avail the facility of primary education. The poor socio-economic background of households have been observed a main contributing factor limiting the scope of non-enrolment of girls and scheduled castes/scheduled tribe children. The need of SC/ST children is felt for contributing income for their households while the girls are needed in the house to look after their younger sibling when their mothers go to forest to collect firewood and fodder. Some of the girl children were also found were engaged in collecting forest products for sale to the contractors or in the market instead of attending schools.

INEQUALITIES: ENROLMENTS

Further the analysis is based on the primary data collected among a sample of primary schools. The overall assessment related to the pattern of enrolments of different groups of children revealed that there exist significant levels of inequalities in the utilisation pattern of primary education between different sex, scheduled caste/scheduled tribe and general castes children living in different category of blocks. However, the differences in enrolments between the children of scheduled castes/scheduled tribes and general castes were more sharper at block level i.e., between educationally developed and backward blocks as compared at district level. The aggregate enrolments of all blocks combined were 92.44 blocks were much higher at 97.10 per cent at against 89.97 per cent for backward blocks.

Further, it revealed that inequalities in the utilisation of primary education were significantly much higher among men and women, either they belong to SC/ST population or general castes population groups, as compared to male population groups. However, the differences in enrolment rates of SC/ST and general castes children were remarkably higher in backward blocks as compared to developed blocks. The aggregate enrolment rates of SC/ST children in all blocks combined were significantly much higher (93.42 per cent) than the backward blocks (89.83 per cent) while the corresponding figure for developed blocks was 98.55 per cent.

Similar trends of differences in the enrolments of general caste children was revealed between different categories of blocks; but their differences are marginally at lower level than the case of SC/ST children.

TABLE 1 : ENROLMENT RATES OF DIFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS

Block	GENERAL CASTES			SC/ST			TOTAL		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Back-ward	92.67	88.01	90.34	92.52	86.25	89.83	92.76	86.80	89.97
Deve- loped	94.96	98.74	96.72	98.65	98.41	98.55	95.78	98.68	97.10
All Blocks	93.68	98.58	92.20	95.26	90.97	93.42	94.02	90.65	92.44

However, the overall enrolment rate of scheduled caste/scheduled tribe children were (93.42 per cent) significantly higher than the children of general caste groups (92.20 per cent). But the enrolment rates of general caste children were marginally higher (90.34 per cent) than the SC/ST children (89.83 per cent) in backward blocks; while in developed blocks the difference in enrolment rates in favour of SC/ST children were around 2 points level. Over and above, the existing inequalities between general castes

and SC/ST children in the utilisation of primary education is mainly caused by lower levels of enrolments of SC/ST girls as compared to general caste girls, particularly in backward blocks. Otherwise the SC/ST population is not lagging behind their upper caste counterpart in availing the facility of primary education for their children. In fact, the enrolments of scheduled caste/scheduled tribe boys are significantly much higher as compared to general caste boys in both developed blocks as well as district level.

STAGNATION, DROP-OUTS AND RETENTION:

The assessment regarding the pattern of stagnation-drop-outs and retention among different groups of children at different classes of primary education has been undertaken through using the information obtained from various documents and registered of sample primary schools. Since every child has to devote atleast five years in the completion of primary level education. Therefore the names and numbers of children enrolled in class one as on five years back were firstly obtained. Thereafter, their names and numbers in the next class, two to five levels, were checked from attendance register of each schools. The cases of drop-outs and repeation due to illness or any other reason of students were also separately examined. We, thus, attempted to work out classwise situation of retention and dro-outs of students at each classes of primary education.

TABLE II : SITUATION OF RETENTION OF CHILDREN IN DIFFERENT CLASSES

Block/Social Groups	Number of Children Reaching in Different Classes				
	I	II	III	IV	V
BACKWARD BLOCKS					
Total	270 (100.00)	251 (92.96)	217 (80.37)	174 (64.44)	165 (61.11)
General Castes	182 (100.00)	169 (92.86)	147 (80.77)	119 (65.38)	111 (60.99)
SC/ST	88 (100.00)	82 (93.18)	70 (79.55)	55 (62.50)	54 (61.37)
DEVELOPED BLOCKS					
Total	338 (100.00)	314 (92.45)	259 (69.34)	212 (54.24)	206 (54.25)
General Castes	212 (100.00)	196 (92.45)	147 (69.34)	115 (54.24)	115 (54.25)
SC/ST	126 (100.00)	118 (93.65)	112 (88.89)	97 (76.98)	91 (72.22)
ALL BLOCKS					
Total	608 (100.00)	565 (92.92)	476 (78.28)	386 (63.49)	371 (61.02)
General Castes	394 (100.00)	365 (92.64)	294 (74.62)	234 (59.39)	230 (58.38)
SC/ST	214 (100.00)	200 (93.46)	182 (85.05)	152 (71.03)	141 (65.89)

It can be seen that in class I retention rate is 100 per cent, and in class II the corresponding rate is above 90 per cent. However, a remarkable decline has been observed in the retention rate of children in class III and IV, finally, only around 66 per cent of children those enrolled in Class I has reached to class V. Inequalities in the retention of children is quite prevalent among the general caste and scheduled tribe/caste children among different blocks, in fact within the blocks. However, the retention rates of SC/ST children in different classes are significantly at higher level than the general caste children in different blocks. However, in developed blocks the differences in retention rates in favour of SC/ST children are remarkably much higher than in backward blocks. The proportion of SC/ST children retaining themselves in utilising primary education are estimated to be 65.69 per cent among SC/ST children as against 58.38 per cent general caste children in all blocks combined. However, the retention rate of SC/ST children in developed blocks is (72.22 per cent) much higher as compared to backward blocks (61.36 per cent). Also, the extent of inequalities among SC/ST children and general caste children is above 18 points in developed blocks as against only 1 point in backward blocks and 7 point for all blocks combined.

It has further been noted that the retention rates of children, both general castes as well as SC/ST groups are significantly at higher level in class two as compared to remaining classes of primary education. This is because, the

general practice in the school is that upto class II, the children are not detained on the ground of poor performance. The instructions of education department are that all children enrolled in class one have to be promoted in class second after the devotion of one year study in concerned class, irrespective of their failure in prescribed examination. However, in classes IV and V the cases of stagnation and repetition of children are also included.

DROP-OUTS

The analysis of drop-outs of children at different classes presented in table-3, is based on the data collected among a sample of primary schools. Drop-out without the completion of primary education or at different classes refer mainly transfer cases from the present schools and discontinuation of study by the children due to any kind of reason. The performance of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe children in term of retaining themselves in different classes of primary education, seems to be rather significant as compared to the children of general castes. Overall drop-out rates are estimated to be around 39 per cent consisting 43 per cent for general caste and 32 per cent for SC/ST children. The rates of drop-out of SC/ST are significantly at lowest level in developed blocks (27.78 per cent) while

TABLE-3 : SITUATION OF DROP-OUT IN DIFFERENT CLASSES

Block/Social Groups	Number of Children					Total Drop-out
	Enrolled in Drop-out before completion of class					
	I	II	III	IV	V	
BACKWARD BLOCKS						
Total	270 (100.00)	19 (7.04)	34 (12.59)	43 (15.93)	9 (3.33)	105 (38.89)
General Castes	182 (100.00)	13 (7.14)	22 (12.08)	28 (15.38)	8 (4.40)	71 (39.01)
SC/ST	88 (100.00)	6 (6.82)	12 (13.64)	15 (17.05)	1 (1.14)	34 (38.64)
DEVELOPED BLOCKS						
Total	338 (100.00)	24 (7.10)	55 (16.27)	47 (13.90)	6 (1.78)	132 (39.05)
General Castes	212 (100.00)	16 (7.55)	49 (23.11)	32 (15.09)	-	97 (45.75)
SC/ST	126 (100.00)	8 (6.34)	6 (6.76)	15 (11.90)	6 (4.76)	35 (27.78)
ALL BLOCKS						
Total	608 (100.00)	43 (7.07)	89 (14.64)	90 (14.80)	15 (2.47)	237 (38.98)
General Castes	394 (100.00)	29 (7.36)	71 (18.02)	60 (15.23)	8 (2.03)	168 (42.64)
SC/ST	214 (100.00)	14 (93.46)	18 (85.05)	30 (71.03)	7 (65.89)	69 (32.94)
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corresponding figure in backward blocks stands for 39 per cent. In both the category of blocks the children dropping out study before the completion of primary level of education are relatively much larger among general caste as compared to SC/ST groups. In all the drop-out rates are generally higher before the completion of third and fourth level of primary educational classes for both the groups of children in both the category of blocks. But overall, the drop-out rates in different classes of primary level education are significantly higher for general caste children as compared to scheduled caste and scheduled tribe children. It indicates the fact that once the children of SC/ST community finding the opportunity of enrolling themselves in primary education they are showing better performance than the higher caste community children in the utilisation of primary education.

During our discussions held with the officials of education department, parents of SC/ST children and teachers of sample primary schools it was revealed that the provision of financial assistance in the form scholarship and free tuition introduced for SC/ST children has been very instrumental measure for increasing their enrolment rates and retaining them in schools regularly. Due to poor socio-economic condition of SC/ST household they were unable to send their children in primary schools. With the

availability of scholarship and other financial incentives a larger number of SC/ST children have found the opportunity to get enrolled in primary schools. However earlier the attraction of SC/ST children only upon availing the financial assistance was high while the level of attendance was rather low. In fact, a significant number of children had enrolled themselves in primary schools mainly to avail the facility of introduced financial assistance. Thus the rates of absenteeism among SC/ST children were comparatively higher than the children of other castes. To overcome from such problems the schools have fixed a general criteria for the eligibility for availing scholarship and other incentives. The children securing 70 per cent regular attendance in schools were considered as the eligible candidates for utilising various financial assistance as introduced for them. Currently the scholarship is distributed on a six month/hoy basis only to the children completing prescribed days of attendance. This newly introduced practice has certainly improved the attendance rate and the level of retention of SC/ST children.

However in certain numbers of schools the problem of timely availability funds from Government and its untimely and improper distribution among children has caused increasing levels of drop-out and low level of attendance among SC/ST children. But, over and above, it could be well attributed the fact that timely and properly distribution of introduced financial assistance among SC/ST's children in

most of the sample primary schools has resulted the better performance of SC/ST children as compared to the children of general castes in the attainment of primary level education.

CONCLUSIONS:

The primary educational facility has been provided quite adequately, both in terms of numbers and geographical spread, in different remote and educationally backward areas and areas dominated by society disadvantaged groups of population such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in district Almora. Keeping into consideration the geographical and topographical problems existing in the high mountain areas of the district, relaxation in the norms fixed for providing primary school facility, based on minimum coverage of population size and the distance of villages to nearest school, is also made.

As the consequences of greater emphasis provided in the expansion of primary level education facilities the literacy rates, enrolment rates and the overall performance in the utilisation of primary education of children is more appreciable in the sample district as compared to state average. In fact, inequalities in the pattern of utilisation of primary education among different socio-economic groups of population, including different sex, are also marginally prevalent at district level.

However, within the district, inequalities in the performance of availing primary education are widely existing among the children of general castes and SC/ST in different blocks, due to differences existing in the socio-economic characteristics, locational situation and accessibility problems in the availability of school facility in different blocks. The backward blocks are not only socio-economically poor but the facility of primary education has not been reached in different locations to the extent that it has been provided in developed blocks; due to the fact that a larger area of backward blocks is located in high mountains and is dominated by very large numbers of small and widely scattered habitation where expansion of educational facilities is rather difficult task. So the performance of different social groups of children in availing primary education is noted comparatively better in developed blocks than in the backward blocks.

The enrolment rates of scheduled castes/scheduled tribe children are relatively higher than the general caste children in different blocks. In fact, the performance of former groups of children in retaining themselves in attending and retaining in primary educational systems is quite appreciable as compared to the latter groups of children. The tendency of dropping out study without the completion of primary education from different classes is also rather lower level among the children of SC/ST than the general castes. The provision of scholarship and other

financial incentives introduced for favour of SC/ST children in the past and its properly and timely distribution has influenced a larger segment of SC/ST children to enrolled themselves in primary education and retaining in different classes.

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